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CBHP Newsletter

July - December 2004

The Philippines: World Health Underclass

In Philippine government hospitals, patients are no longer treated as humans. At the Quirino Memorial Hospital, for example, five mothers, including their newborns, are squeezed into a single bed. At the National Kidney and Transplant Institute, a patient who was too poor to pay for the dialysis suffered complications. She and her family pleaded with the staff to give her oxygen, but this was ignored. After a few minutes, the patient died. Every doctor in any government hospital has become a witness to different stories of tragedy.

A look at the leading causes of sickness in the country proves even more the ailing health care system in the country. The list includes infectious diseases which can easily be treated.

The World Health Organization (WHO) listed the Philippines as one of the 22 highest-burdened TB countries in the world.

TEN LEADING CAUSES OF SICKNESS (2001)

No. & Rate/100,000 Population

CAUSE	NO.	RATE
1. Diarrheas	845.526	1085.0
2. Bronchitis/Bronchiolitis	694,836	891.7
3. Pneumonias	652,585	837.4
4. Influenza	499,887	641.5
5. Hypertension	318,521	408.7
6. TB Respiratory	110,841	142.2
7. Diseases of the Heart	47,040	60.4
8. Malaria	40,543	52.0
9. Measles	24,494	31.4
10. Chickenpox	24,359	31.3

Source: Department of Health

The Philippines belong to the world's health underclass. The 2000 WHO Health Development Report (HDR) assessed health systems in 191 countries. The Philippines ranked 126th in terms of "level of health," trailing even the Pacific Islands of Fiji and Palau.

Low budget

These are but a few manifestations of the gross neglect of the people's health by the government. For five years, from 2000 to 2004, government expenditures on health were around 0.3 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), way below the WHO-prescribed five percent of the GDP spending for health.

The share of health spending in the national budget has become even more pitiful through the years. In 2000, the allocation for health was 2.15 percent of the national budget. By 2004, it was only 1.49 percent. Of the proposed P907.59-billion national budget for 2005, only P12.93 billion will be allotted for health or 1.42 percent of the total budget.

The slight nominal increase of the health budget from 2004 to 2005 is insufficient to make up for inflation

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and population growth. The average population growth rate stands at 2.36 percent. According to the National Statistics Office, inflation rate as of September 2004 is 6.9 percent.

The Office of the Secretary gets more than 90 percent of the Department of Health budget.

Meanwhile, the budget of the Lung Center of the Philippines dwindled from P668.72 million in 2000 to only P185 million this year. The National Kidney and Transplant Institute got an inadequate average of P177 million in the past five years. In the same period, the Philippine Heart Center was given an even smaller average of P158 million.

The budget of the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) is derived from the University of the Philippines System's budget. For 2005, the PGH will get P988.24 million with no funds at all for capital outlay.

Yet, for the past five years, an average of P1.33 billion is allotted to the Department of National Defense's hospitals. The Armed Forces of the Philippines Medical Center usually gets around P700 million while the Veterans Memorial Medical Center has a P600-million annual budget.

In 2000, health spending amounted to only 10.4 percent of the debt interest payments and 40.48 percent of the defense spending. In the proposed budget for 2005, health spending is only 4.28 percent of the debt interest payments and 29.26 percent of defense spending.

While health spending continued to decline from 2000 to 2004 (except in 2002), debt interest payments have steadily risen. There was a 51.88 percent increase in debt interest payments from 2000 to 2004. In 2001, interest payments ate up 21 percent of the national budget. For 2005, debt interest payments will gobble up 33 percent of the national budget. (see table 2)

Funds for capital outlay of hospitals have been reduced. Much-needed machines and equipment cannot be bought. The purchase of medical supplies and drugs are restricted due to limited budget and higher prices.

High cost of health services

As the government reduces subsidies for government hospitals, it is implementing revenue-generating schemes. Consequently, the poor majority is denied access to needed hospital services.

All patients, regardless of financial capability, are required to pay for all medical supplies and medicines used. Cotton balls, needles, syringes, sutures, bandages, etc. have an equivalent price. Even laboratory procedures which used to be free are now charged. Support for indigent patients has become extremely limited.

The prices of drugs and medicine in the Philippines are among the highest in Asia. According to former Health Secretary Alberto Romualdez, the prices of medicine in the country are 250 to 1,600 percent higher than in neighboring Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The poor avoid going to hospitals because they cannot pay for medical services and medicines. The Department of Health itself admitted that the average hospital bill is three times their average monthly income. More than 50 percent of the population doesn't receive even a minimum monthly income.

Poor patients and their families have been reduced to begging just so they could come up with the money for their treatment and medication. A recent survey of the Kilosbayan Para sa Kalusugan on the state of our government

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Table 2

Year	Health	Debt interest payments	Defense
2000	14.66 billion	140.89 billion	36.21 billion
2001	13.64 billion	181.60 billion	32.78 billion
2002	14.49 billion	185.86 billion	38.91 billion
2003	12.40 billion	226.41 billion	44.42 billion
2004	12.88 billion	271.53 billion	43.85 billion
2005*	12.93 billion	301.69 billion	44.19 billion

Source: Details of National Government Expenditures 2000-2002, 2002-2004, 2003-2005, Department of Budget and Management

Military harasses medical mission team

Sealing Mindoro's reputation as the military's psychological warfare laboratory, a team of medical mission (MM) volunteers were harassed by the military and their agents while a medical mission was ongoing.

While the team was in Abra de Ilog, several military and Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) trailed them. At Cabacao, where the first medical mission was held, the same military and paramilitary group held a picket rally. They were holding placards and chanting slogans, calling the medical mission team a front of the New People's Army (NPA). The MM team did not mind, and this apparently infuriated the military. Without any provocation, they approached the mission team and took their pictures while demanding that they leave the place immediately. The barangay captain, fearful of what would happen to his barangay, asked the medical mission team to leave.

When they were on their way to Mamburao, the next stop-over of the MM team, the military and CAFGUs followed them. The harassers were riding on a dump truck and another vehicle with red plate numbers. They surrounded the school where the MM team was to spend the night. They also posted their placards around the school. The next day, the team headed to Sta. Cruz, where they were accepted by the mayor. While the mission was ongoing, the military and CAFGUs arrived and started chanting anti-NPA slogans. The MM team decided to close the gate of the gym where they were doing the mission. After a few minutes, the harassers, many of them wearing bonnets to cover their faces and M-16 armalites, forced open the gym. One of the marshals and his companion were manhandled. When the chief marshal tried to help them, he was hit with the butt of an M-16. As commotion ensued, the patients started running out, with many of them already hurt. Not even the police, which the mayor sent to ensure the safety of the MM team, could not do anything to stop the harassment.

The MM team's chief negotiator was hit in the head with a stone while talking to the governor on her mobile phone.

When the commotion stopped, some of the team members accompanied the victims of harassment to the police station to file a blotter. The military and CAFGUs continued to harass those who stayed behind, threatening them that they would burn the team's buses if they would not leave. Nails were put on the buses' tires, but a volunteer noticed it.

The reprehensible act not only disrupted a legitimate medical mission, it also traumatized the local patients. Some of the patients were cowering in fear, mumbling, "There they go again."

The harassment only defies international humanitarian laws, which guarantees the safety of medical personnel. The government has long abandoned its duty to provide health services to the people and medical missions undertaken by concerned groups serve to bridge the yawning gap in health care. What logic is there for government agents to disrupt a medical mission and to do harm upon the volunteers? Such dastardly act only isolates them from the very people whom they supposedly serve.

Survey shows health care beyond patients' reach

A survey conducted by the Kilos Bayan para sa Kalusugan (KBK) in August 2004 showed that patients in government hospitals could hardly afford the cost of health care. Even if they have the money, they still have to wait for available beds. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents said that they had to wait for three days to seven months before they were admitted. Of these, 61 percent said that they had no money to pay for the admission. The rest had to wait for an available bed.

Of those who were already confined, 72 percent had to borrow, solicit or ask financial help from relatives to pay their hospital bills.

The continuing commercialization of health care has prompted Bayan Muna Rep. Satur Ocampo to file a resolution calling for a congressional inquiry on the matter. In his speech, Ocampo said that the "provision of health services in government hospitals has reached the critical level."

The mini-survey had 553 respondents from 13 public hospitals. Forty-five percent of the respondents were jobless, while 11 percent were farmers, factory workers and vendors. Their reasons for hospitalization were child deliveries/pregnancies, pneumonia, cancer, dengue, kidney problem, heart ailments and tuberculosis.

Culture of Courage

by Ross Mayor

The Tumandoks, the ethnic tribe of Panay Island, may hardly ring a bell among city denizens, but their stories of courage can teach jaded urbanites a thing or two about the importance of unity and asserting one's rights to a decent life. The first time I have heard about the Tumandoks was when I was asked to document the medical mission to be conducted by HELP-Panay in Barangay Sinunod in Tapaz, Capiz.

Frankly, I had my reservation in going. Having joined a couple of medical missions in remote areas, I knew that the trail going to the community would be tortuous. I have no problem with a sticky or muddy trail, or even long hours of walking, but I do have a big problem with heights. But I was assured that the trail was a federal road. The people at HELP-Panay even used the terms highway and feather road. Against my better judgment, I went.

From Tapaz town proper, we had to ride a motorcycle to go to Daang Sur, the nearest barangay that can be reached by a motorcycle. The one-hour ride on a bumpy and dusty road proved to be the least of my worries. As we reached Roxas 8, a steep gravel road seemed to rise out of the mountain to greet us. My nightmare was about to begin.

An acrophobic's worst nightmare

Our bike rider tried to rev up his motorcycle, but Dr. Ella and I volunteered to just walk. We thought it was safer that way and unless we look down just to see how high up we were, we would be okay. This went on for about a couple of times and this prepared us for our next challenge: going up and down the federal road, which can be best described as a monument to engineering stupidity. At its steepest, the road has an angle of about 75 to 80 degrees and rises to about 150 feet. Halfway is a sharp curve; motorists would have to make a V-turn to clear it. If this was their federal road, I hated to think what their highway would look like.

Frayed nerves aside, we reached Daang Sur without any bruises. After lunch, we set off for Sinunod. And this was where the real challenge unfolded. The trail included narrow footpaths high up the mountain, flanked by ravines on both sides with only cogon grass to hold on should one fall; and steep paths. Next time they talk about highways and feather roads, I already know what to expect.

Profile

After about three hours of walking, we finally reached the community. One thing that I immediately noticed was that the community was relatively advanced compared to other remote communities I've been to. The people were particular about their hygiene and the house we slept in had a comfort room with an Antipolo-type latrine.

A steep and muddy trail passes for a federal road in Sinundungan.

Another pleasant surprise that greeted us as we made our final ascent was hearing a pop song coming from a radio. Despite the area's remoteness, the people had electricity, thanks to a single solar panel installed during the regime of ousted President Joseph Estrada. The residents just recharge their batteries and they could then connect a single appliance or a light bulb to it.

But the residents' good fortune stops there. For like other indigenous tribes, the mere fact that they belong to an ethnic tribe works against them.

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Living in a remote area, their primary source of income is their kaingin farm, which they plant with fruit-bearing trees or organic wild rice. During the lean season, many of the men would go down to the town proper for jobs. While they could get jobs as farmhands or as bike riders, they are still discriminated upon. For the same job, their wages would only be half of what lowlanders receive.

History of oppression

For centuries, the Tumandoks live mainly on the ranges of Panay Island. But in 1962, 33,310 hectares of the ranges were declared a military reservation for the 3rd Infantry Division. The area was so big; it encompasses 12 percent of the land area of Capiz. Since then, the residents are being driven away from their ancestral land.

With Martial Law, the Tumandoks became all the more fair targets to the military. Many of their family heirlooms, consisting of gold jewelries, gold-plated musical instruments, and old coins dating back to the Spanish era, were stolen by the military.

In the 1980s, the farmers organized themselves and lobbied for a higher price for their rice. Two traders, sympathetic to their plight, agreed to buy the rice at the price they set. The response of the military was swift and brutal. The traders were abducted and tortured to teach them a lesson and to warn other traders. The crops of the Tumandoks were also confiscated on the flimsy allegation that these were meant for the New People's Army.

Health Profile

A community's health status is reflective of its economic status. This holds true, especially in Sinundungan. Although there was no data on the rate of malnutrition in the community, it was evident that this was prevalent. Children were thinner and smaller for their age ranges.

During the medical mission, there were several cases of far advanced pulmonary tuberculosis, with patients coughing up blood. Other prevalent complaints were hypertension, upper respiratory infection, primary complex, skin problems, goiter, and muscle and joint pains, intestinal parasitism and gastritis. There was also one patient with schizophrenia.

Their reproductive health status still leaves a lot to be improved. They have a relatively easier access to contraceptives, but in some tribes, children as young as 13 are allowed to marry.

Working for a better society

Adversity can easily weaken a person's resolve, but for the Tumandoks, it is the fuel that ignites their desire to unite themselves and collectively assert their right to a decent life.

Their organization, also called Tumandok, is at the forefront of their struggle. Tumandok is active in educating the people of the various issues that affect them and in mobilizing them. Through their lobbying efforts, the provincial board of Capiz imposed a ten-year moratorium on the planned construction of a dam that would affect five barangays. The moratorium

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APIRD Advisory

Attention all CHD member- programs

This is your chance to let other people know what you are doing!

CBHP Profile is a semi-regular column in Tambalan, featuring a specific community based health program and its activities.

We encourage all CBHPs to send us a brief description of the program (history,mission-vision,...), a profile of the areas where the program operates, some photographs, and the major activities undertaken. It does not have to be in para-graph form. Just send us the raw data and we will process it for you.

Data may be written in Filipino or English. You can send it by fax (02) 926-8536, or by e-mail (apird_chd@yahoo.com)

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My Malindang Experience

by: Leiden Faith B. Mostrales

The following is the account of Leiden Faith's experience in a community in Mindanao. The exposure/medical mission allowed the participants, mainly medical students, to experience the life in a poor and remote community and to provide the people badly needed medical services. Away from the comforts of home and the convenience of modern technologies, Leiden made some suprising discoveries amidst the simplicity of Malindang.

Summer started early for us at MSU-College of Medicine and I was starting to get a little bored being used to sleeping late and waking up early for school. I decided to volunteer at ZPHEP, a community-based health program, which was introduced to us by Dr. Hari some days ago. I did learn a great deal from that Malindang training.

> ...that was one of the best things that happened in my entire life...

First, I would like to say that that was one of the best things that happened in my entire life. Not that the whole thing was perfect, which is what really made the experience quite great, but the fact that I've somehow helped other people, another tribe while doing one of the things I'd like best to do – mountain climbing – was just so satisfying. The trail was just plain awesome! I must say though, that it was the longest walk I've ever had in my entire life. But the whole thing was just plain rewarding.

Barangay Gandawan

We started for Mount Malindang on the 23rd of April. We rode a private vehicle from Ozamis up to barangay Mansawan, one of the bigger barangays in mount Malindang. We had to get off the pick-up truck three times in steep paths we took.

Our trek started from there up to the next barangay, Gandawan, where we were to hold our medical mission. It was around an hour and a half walk away. Good thing they hired some horses to carry some of our baggage. There was no electricity and no mobile signal. We were "technology" dead most of the time, so to speak, that was why most of us were thrilled when we heard that there was mobile signal in one part of the barangay during our last night there.

Water is abundant but cold. And we really didn't have any problem with the comfort rooms because there were several flush toilets around. It's just that, most of the CRs have no roofs so you could count shooting stars while peeing. We have to bath under open skies, too. Meals were simple, but tasty and unique. It was fortunate that our cook knows how to fix one vegetable into different dishes that's why sayote for three to four days was tolerable.

We did a survey on the day after we arrived (day 2). The questionnaire, which was prepared by ZPHEP , consisted of questions which assesses the situation (and status) of the people there and their awareness on family planning. Our aim was to cover the whole barangay that day. It was quite an experience since we have to climb other mountains (or were those hills?) just to get to neighboring puroks. Aside from filling out the questionnaires, we were also tasked to inform the people about the medical mission the following day and, being medical students, to render free blood pressure check-up to some of them.

It was really great when you really get to talk to the Subanen people there and observe how they live. Most of them are farmers and they make a living by planting different crops in season. When we were there, it was chives and sayote. Most of them are natives but I was quite surprised that a number of them came from neighboring cities or provinces in Misamis Occidental and migrated there around two to three decades ago to search for better lives.

Among other things, I noticed that most of them owned at least one horse. It was really a necessity to own one especially in transporting their harvested goods to the nearest market place at barangay Mansawan.

The medical mission the following day (day 3) was another experience I would never forget. We were told that my classmates and I would be assigned to handle the medical check-ups. But aside from taking the medical history and physical examination, I didn't expect that we were also tasked to give their corresponding prescription and treatment plan. This had me quite in shock at first since I've just finished my second year in medicine and I haven't dealt with real patients without a clinical instructor yet nor have I given a prescription...ever!

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The Philippines is in fiscal crisis

The overburdening fiscal crisis

Three months after President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declared in September this year that the economy is in fiscal crisis, she reversed her earlier declaration saying in mid-November that the fiscal crisis is over.

What made PGMA hoisted the alarm about the crisis in the first place was the concern raised by an international ratings agency (Moody's Investors Service) regarding the sustainability of the government's fiscal and debt positions. What was being questioned here was the capacity of the government to raise revenues and settle its obligation to the country's creditors. Malacanang was bothered that the review's negative result would mean a credit downgrade for the country, signaling higher risk for investors in investing in the Philippines, and also making borrowings for the country more expensive. A credit downgrade is said to cost at least P20 billion in interest payments alone.

After announcing the fiscal crisis, GMA pressed the 13th Congress to pass eight priority tax measures, which are as follows: 1) increase in alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco taxes; 2) performance-based lateral attrition for revenue-collection agencies; 3) tax amnesty; 4) rationalization of fiscal incentives; 5) increase in value-added tax rate; 6) simplified net income tax; 7) franchise tax on telecommunication and broadcasting companies; and 8) increase in petroleum taxes. Passage of such measures is expected to raise P80 billion annually. Malacanang also dangled on the legislators the call for reduction of their priority development assistance fund or the so-called pork barrel while pushing for passing of the tax measures. Amidst all these were news reports also that the congressional pork barrel will be retained in full. Each representative gets P70million in pork barrel while every senator gets P240 million. What a way for the executive and legislative branches of government to cook up favors for their foreign sponsors' interest over the people's interest.

Doubts were raised though on GMA's claim that the fiscal crisis is over, questioning more the government's ability to raise revenues because of its record inefficiency in revenue collection.

In reality, the Philippines has been in fiscal crisis ever since because of the country's perennial deficit spending. The government resorted to borrowings in order to fill the budget gap, which only worsened the country's debt burden. The government debt pile now amounts to $60 billion, which when taken on a per capita, every Filipino (young and old) is indebted with $750 (P42,375).

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AFP Scandal

The scandal-ridden Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) scored another black eye with the revelation that one of its top officials plundered millions of the people's money. Major General Carlos Garcia, the former comptroller of the AFP, is facing graft and corruption charges for unexplained wealth. As comptroller, Garcia handled the budget of the AFP. The military tribunal also charged him with violations of Articles of War 95 (conduct unbecoming a government official and gentleman) and 96 (conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline).

Investigations showed that Garcia had assets amounting to P143 million. These include a rest house in Iloilo, mansions and condominiums and luxury cars, which he did not declare in his latest Statement of Assets and Liabilities.

His unexplained wealth came to light when one of his sons, who was studying in the US, was apprehended by US customs officials for not declaring the USD 100,000 he was carrying.

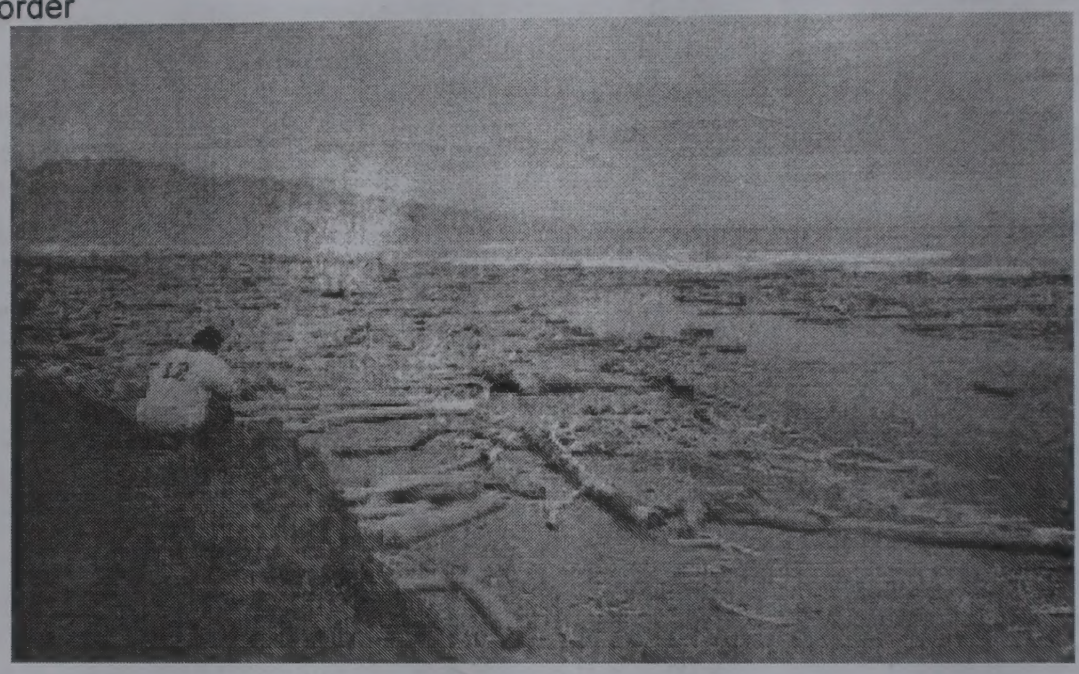
Garcia's former budget officer, Col. George Rabusa, is also facing graft and corruption charges. Investigators said that in 2003, Rabusa's declared net worth was P7.18 million. However, he and his family had several transactions that amounted to P34.31 million.

With two of its alumni facing graft charges, the Philippine Military Academy now has a new name: Philippine Millionaire's Academy.

Nature Strikes Back

Just before the year ended, tragedy struck the country when two typhoons ripped through Luzon. The first storm to slice through Luzon was "Winnie," which battered the provinces of Quezon, Aurora, Rizal, Nueva Ecija and Bulacan. Days after "Winnie," typhoon "Yoyong" wreaked havoc on the same provinces. In the aftermath, the National Disaster Coordinating Council reported that 168,000 individuals had been affected, while the death toll exceeded the thousand-mark. What made it more tragic was that rampant illegal logging in the Sierra Madre ranges aggravated the catastrophe.

What killed the people were the flashfloods caused by the massive



denudation of the forest covers surrounding the provinces. Television footages showed thousands of logs floating as flashfloods destroyed communities in Quezon and Nueva Ecija.

The government's knee-jerk reaction to the catastrophe was typical. The widespread illegal logging in the Sierra Madre range had been going on for years, but it was only after the disaster that the government reacted. Environment Secretary Michael Defensor placed several environment officials in Central and Southern Luzon under investigation, while another probe had been set to determine the identity of illegal loggers in the regions.

For the meantime, in the absence of big fishes in illegal logging, the government shifted the blame on the small fries: the slash-and-burn farmers and the so-called carabao loggers. However, with the numbers of logs that floated in the floods, it was evident that these small fries could not have caused the destruction. Television reports showed that one needs expensive tools like an electric chain saw to cut a sturdy tree.

Peace talks in jeopardy

The peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) have been put in jeopardy.

In a recent statement, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo virtually reiterated that the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army were "terrorists." Macapagal-Arroyo said that there were growing links between the revolutionary Left and international terrorist organizations.

In reaction, Luis Jalandoni, chair of the NDFP panel reacted said, "The President was sabotaging the sincere efforts to push back-channel talks that would pave the way for the resumption of formal peace talks by citing obviously fabricated intelligence reports..."

Moreover, Jose Maria Sison, NDFP chief political consultant, said, "It is highly regrettable that the Macapagal-Arroyo has practically shut the door to GRP peace negotiations with the NDFP and has so arrogantly boasted of defeating the revolutionary movement of the

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people with the sword."

The NDFP also said the GRP has yet to comply with its obligations under the Oslo Joint Statements I and II. Among these include measures to address the "terrorist" listing of CPP, NPA and Sison, release of political prisoners and the indemnification of human rights victims.

Last August 9, the U.S. government renewed the inclusion of CPP and NPA in the list of foreign terrorist organizations. The NDFP deemed that the GRP has not taken effective measures on the matter.

Furthermore, the GRP panel has reported it had released only 17 of the 32 political prisoners whose release has been approved by Macapagal-Arroyo as early as January 2001. The NDFP urged the GRP release the 270 political prisoners, in particular, expedite the release of detained women, children and sick for humanitarian reasons.

The NDFP also complained that the GRP had not promptly taken the effective measures to enable the victims of human rights during martial law to receive indemnification. The recovered Marcos ill-gotten wealth deposited in the Philippine National Bank (PNB) had been transferred to the National Treasury. The NDFP asserted that executive measures may be undertaken to set aside the amount for the indemnification of the victims without the need for legislative action.

On the other hand, a positive development came into being. The Joint Secretariat (JS) of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) was formed and operationalized in July, as agreed upon by both parties. The JMC shall oversee the implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL). The JS has so far received more than a hundred complaints against government forces and one complaint against the NPA.

Brutal Déjà vu

In a scene reminiscent of the 1987 Mendiola massacre that left 13 protesting farmers dead, another carnage unfolded at the Cojuangco-owned Hacienda Luisita. Fed up with their conditions, workers at the Hacienda Luisita staged a strike on November 6. Aside from pay increase, they were demanding the revocation of the stock distribution option (SDO) scheme. The scheme was implemented by former President Corazon Aquino, a member of the Cojuangco clan, to virtually exempt the estate from the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. The SDO made it appear that the farmer-beneficiaries were part-owners of Luisita. In truth, however, they were nothing but mere farm hands whose earnings were not enough to meet their daily needs. Regular workers earn P199.50 a day, while casuals receive aP194.50. However, they are only allowed to work once or twice a week.

While the workers were urging the management to return to the negotiating table, Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas acted swiftly – and brutally.In a move denounced as unconstitutional, she called in soldiers from the Northern Luzon command to help the local police disperse the workers and implement the return to work order. On November 16, the confrontation turned bloody.

The police and the military played a violent tug of war with the workers. Water cannons and tear gas were used to push back the workers, but the workers stood their ground. They would camper but would then regroup and maintain their picketlines. When the water cannons and tear gas proved no match to the workers, the government troops finally rained bullets on the workers. Witnesses said that the first was a rapid burst of gunfire. It stopped after a few minutes and when it was resumed, the gunfire was sporadic. When the chaos ended, seven persons were dead while 181 were wounded.

To deflect criticisms, the military and Rep. Benigno Aquino, the son of former President Aquino, charged that the strike was infiltrated by the NPA. They alleged that the infiltrators fired first and the government only responded.

Investigations, however, showed that this was not true. An independent autopsy conducted on the dead showed that their bullet wounds indicated that the bullets entered their backs or their sides. Witnesses' accounts, as well as television footages, showed the strikers running away from the soldiers at the start of the gunfire. One of the victims, a male in his early 20s, had lacerations on his

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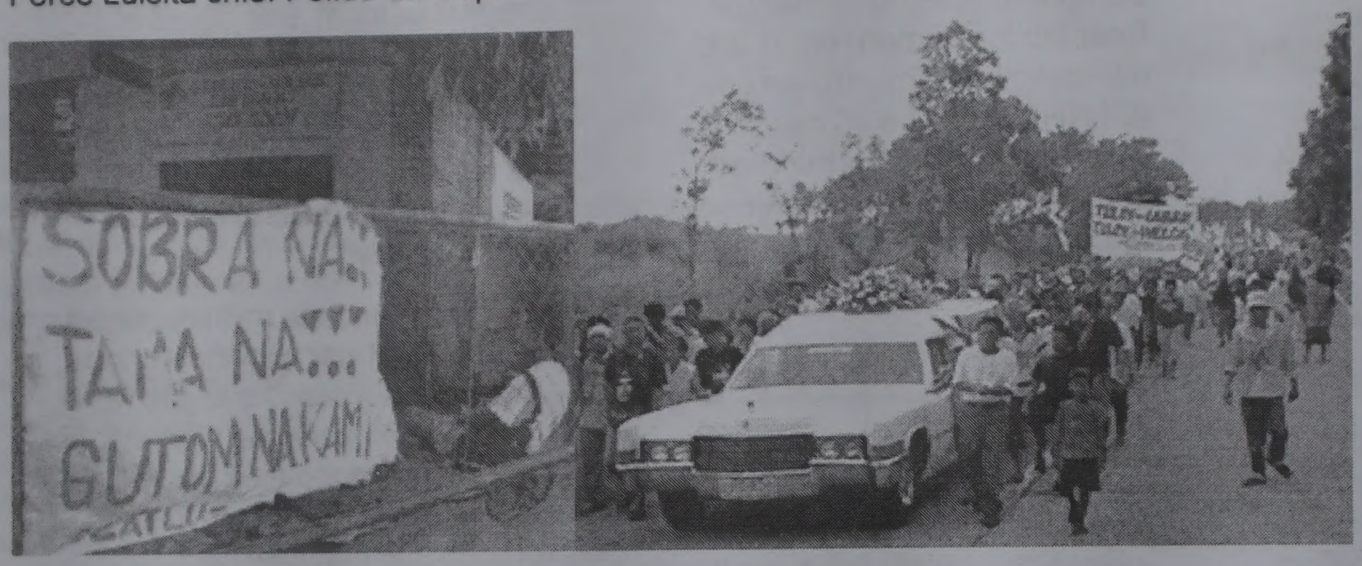
neck. This was consistent with eyewitnesses' accounts that the boy was still alive when he fell down after being hit. Soldiers looped a barbed wire on his neck and dragged him to a nearby tree where he was shot to death.

In an investigation conducted by the House of Representatives, Task Force Luisita chief Police Sr. Supt. Angel Sunglao and PNP Region III Director Enrique Galang were asked if the protesters fired guns at them. The two however, could not categorically say yes. Video footages presented by the two, as well as by the Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace did not show any shots coming from the protesters' side.

There are already indications that the case would be whitewashed. The media are taking the Cojuangco's line that the strike was illegal and infiltrated with NPAs.



Militants are saying that the Luisita case is a tricky issue as far as landlords are concerned because its fair resolution would inspire other hacienda workers to assert their rights to the land they are tilling.

High voltage scam

Consumers have been zapped with a series of power rate hikes. On July, the power rate increased by 42 percent, from P3.18 per kilowatt hour to P3.31kwh.

On September, the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) approved the National Power Corporation's 97.98 centavos rate hike per kwh. As a triple whammy, the ERC removed the 40 percent subsidy of Meralco. Because of the removal, residential consumers would have to pay an additional 28.52 centavos per kwh. The move did not spare government hospitals, which now have to pay 43.56 centavos per kwh.

Sources: bulatlat.com, ibon foundation, inq7.net., HEAD presentation
Photos and artworks taken from Pinoy Weekly, bulatlat.com, CDRC

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hospitals revealed that 72 percent of patients were able to settle their bills either by borrowing, soliciting, or begging for contributions from relatives, friends, politicians and charitable institutions.

Rhetoric

The DOH's vision to be the "Leader of Health of All Filipinos through equitable, sustainable and quality health for all Filipinos, especially the poor and to lead the quest for excellence in health" is but mere rhetoric. The slogan is a big insult to the thousands of victims of the government's systematic outright neglect of the people's health.

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is due to expire, but the Tumandoks are already planning their next move to stop the construction.

Thanks to their educational discussions, the Tumandoks are now more aware of their rights. When the military occupied a school building due to its vantage location, the residents demanded that they leave immediately since it is against the Geneva Convention.

They are also in the process of looking for direct dealers in Metro Manila so they could set competitive prices for their products and produce, which include organic rice.

The Tumandoks face an uphill climb in their struggle for a just and humane society. But with the solidarity and courage they show, one can hope that their efforts would not be in vain.

The medical mission was organized by HELP-Panay in coordination with the Tumandok People's Assembly, Panay Alliance- Karapatan and the Council for Health and Development (CHD). Other sponsors included Bayan Muna - Panay, Rotary Club of Molo, Nursing Student Council and different Medical Student Associations of the West Visayas State University and Ms. Lourdes Hechanova, a nurse who works in Houston and volunteers with Grace Presbyterian Church in Texas.

New project trains leaders on reproductive health

Reproductive health remains to be a tricky issue in the Visayas, particularly in Region VII. To address this, several organizations in the region have banded together and launched a project that would train leaders on reproductive health.

We are reprinting articles from Acus (Volume 3, Issue No. 1), the newsletter of the Visayas Primary Health Care Services, to share with our readers the efforts of different organizations in improving the people's reproductive health.

Unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases... high rates of population growth and high fertility.., too early, too many,too frequent and poorly-timed pregnancies, and high maternal and infant mortality rates.

These are a few of the many reproductive health problems that continue to beset our population. In the 1995 National Demographic and Health Survey,the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in the Visayas region was highest in Region VII at 189.8 per 100,000 live births. The Infant Mortality Rate was also highest in Region VII compared to other regions in the Visayas at 60 per 1,000 live births.

Violence against women and children, including rape, is also rampant.

Concern for such issues has inspired certain groups in the Visayas region to come and work together towards the goal of advancing reproductive health.

The Leadership Program for Reproductive Health in the Visayas is initiated by the Sociology-Anthropology Research Group (S0ARG) of the University of San Carlos, the Media Advocates for Reproductive Health and Empowerment (MARhE) Bacolod City, the Association of Municipal Health Officers of the Philippines (AMHOP)-Bohol Chapter,and the Visayas Primary Health Care Services (VPHCS).

The project aims to develop a corps of leaders from among the various sectors of society, i.e., local government units/government organizations, non-government organizations, academe, mass media, youth, health service providers, local stakeholders and grassroots organizations. After the training, it is hoped that these leaders can organize and empower their respective sectors and shape reproductive health education, advocacy, and service delivery and influence local policies toward the optimum reproductive wellbeing of the population.

The three-year program which started in late 2003 employs the following strategies, namely:

1. Capability-building program which aims to develop the pool of leaders with enhanced knowledge, skills and attitudes on concepts related to gender equality, empowerment of women, sexuality, reproductive health, and reproductive rights.

2. Advocacy which aims to heighten public awareness on reproductive health and lobby for local legislation in support of RH, an increase in the national health budget, and access and utilization of gender-sensitive RH services in health centers.

3. Networking among various sectors to promote awareness and carry out activities on RH.

The VPHCS is tasked to train adult and youth leaders of various peoples organizations in the grassroots in the Visayas regions.

It sponsored a leadership training workshop seminar on reproductive health on June 21 to 26 in Cebu City. Some 14 leaders from 12 people's organizations from the sectors of the urban poor, peasants, fisherfolks and women in Cebu, Bohol and Negros Oriental joined the seminar. The leaders were trained on basic community-based leadership, basic concepts on sex and gender, promotion of safe motherhood and the prevention of unplanned pregnancy, addressing reproductive tract infections, addressing violence against women and children, enhancing men's involvement in

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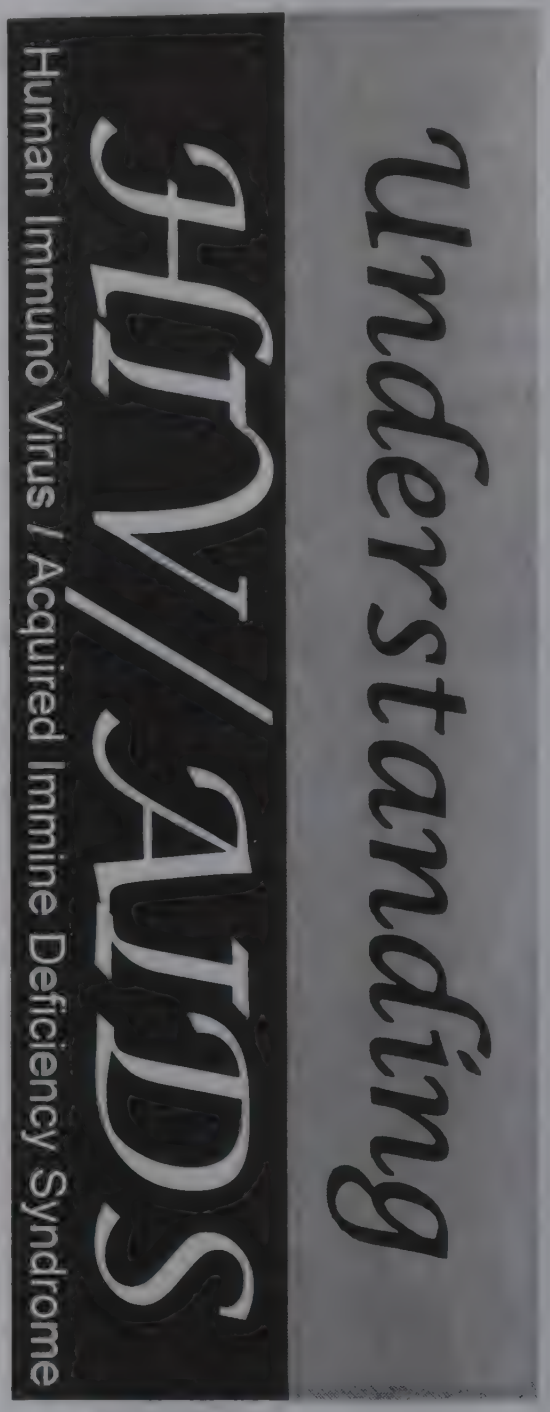
Spread of AIDS feared; male carriers outnumber females



Gabriela, a progressive organization of Filipino women, registered its strong opposition to the continuing Balikatan war exercises between Filipino and American troops. Gabriela said the social costs of the U.S. military presence include the commodification of Filipino women and the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) stated in its country report on the Philippines, "Although the Philippines has had some success keeping the AIDS epidemic at bay, an active sex industry and a population of injecting drug users pose an ongoing threat for future spread of the disease."

Gabriela Secretary General Emmi de Jesus said that prostitution is prevalent in areas where American soldiers are present. In the 1990s before the repeal of the Military Bases Agreement (MBA), there were 2,000 establishments for "rest and recreation," with US military as primary customers. She noted that it was also in cities around US bases where Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) infection cases were first reported in the Philippines.

Sexually-transmitted diseases were widespread particularly in Angeles and Olongapo where there were about 50,000 "hospitality girls" at the peak of the Vietnam war.

In 2001, two years after the ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement, there were 429 new bar girls in Angeles City who provided "take-home service," an obvious euphemism for prostitution. In 2002, Tanikala Inc., documented 36 women, some as young as 13 years old, who were victims of sex trafficking from Davao to Zamboanga City, where the joint RP-US military exercises were held. Zamboanga City reportedly had as many as 2,000 prostituted women. Majority of people with HIV/AIDS in the country are male, said the Department of Health. Government figures showed that 63 percent of HIV/AIDS cases since 1984 are men. However, this does not mean that women are less prone. Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit said that is only a matter of time before many women become infected since "biologically, men will infect women as men have more sexual partners." The growing number of prostituted women is also another factor for an impending epidemic.

As of December 2004, the HIV/AIDS Registry recorded 2,200 cases of HIV/AIDS in a 20-year period. Twelve of the new cases were recorded in December. Sexual intercourse (84%) remains to be the leading mode of transmission. Of the number, 1,351 involved heterosexual contact; 385 homosexual contact; and 116 bisexual contact.

Other modes of transmission include blood infection (17 cases), drug use (6), needle prick injuries (3) and perinatal (33). Two hundred eighty-nine reported no prior exposure.

Source: National Epidemiology Center - Department of Health HIV/AIDS Registry

OFWs at risk

Of the 2,200 HIV/AIDS cases,

- 725 (33%) were overseas Filipino Workers
  - 260 were seafarers
  - 123 were domestic helpers
  - 66 were employees
  - 49 were health workers (nurses, caregivers, pharmacists, doctors)
  - 47 were entertainers

Environmental Investigatory Mission Documents

Continuing Environmental Damage Caused by Lepanto

Preliminary Report of the October 25-26 EIM

prepared by the Save the Abra River Movement

Another Environmental Investigatory Mission (EIM) along the Abra River was organized by the Save the Abra River Movement (STARM) last October 25-26, 2004. Over 116 individuals were mobilized. The EIM was divided into the Upper Abra River team which covered Mankayan, Benguet down to Cervantes and Quirino, Ilocos Sur and the Lower Abra River team which surveyed the Abra and lower Ilocos Sur segments of the river. Members of the EIM team included the Saint Louis University, University of the Philippines Baguio, Benguet State University, Easter School, Itogon National High School, the University of Northern Philippines and Abra State Institute for Science and Technology. Other participants came from the Accion Contra el Hambre, United Church of Christ in the Philippines and in Canada, the Health Action Information Network and the Cordillera People's Alliance. Legal assistance was provided by the Cordillera Human Rights Organization and Tanggol Kalikasan. Members of the media, from VIACOMM, radio DZEQ and Northern Dispatch documented the EIM.

The EIM was conducted in partnership with MAQUITACDG (Mankayan, Quirino, Tadian, Cervantes Danggayan a-Gunglo, the alliance of people's organization living along the Upper Abra River). At various points along the Abra River, the EIM team was hosted by Abra Governor Vicente "Vicsyd" Valera, Jr. and his wife Bangued Mayor Zita "Ching" Valera, Ilocos Sur Provincial Governor Luis "Chavit" Singson, the Ilocos Sur Provincial Board, the municipal governments of Cervantes, Quirino and Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Mankayan, Benguet and Manabo, Abra, the barangays of Puro, Casibir, Sallacong and San Mariano, Ilocos Sur and Pakiling, Abra. Most of these supportive LGUs had recently made resolutions demanding a stop to further Lepanto expansion.

Water sampling for physicochemical testing was conducted at 17 points along the Abra River from Mankayan, Benguet all the way down to Abra and the mouth of the Abra River in Caoayan and Santa, Ilocos Sur. Soil samples were also collected from at least 6 sites. Water sampling started at the Carbon-in-Pulp (CIP) Mill Outlet of Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corporation in contrast to the DENR-Lepanto Multi-Partite Monitoring Team which starts its water sampling only at Tailings Dam 5A. Pollution must be measured from the CIP Mill Outlet since discharge from this area already comes in contact with the environment and the nearby communities of Paalaban and Cabitin.

Samples taken from the CIP Mill outlet registered a basic pH (9.31) and emitted a strong acetone-like smell. The pH of water allegedly coming from underground tunnels and also released at the back of the CIP Mill was acidic (4.07). A sample taken at the mid-portion of Tailings Dam 5A was also acidic (6.25).

Dissolved oxygen readings at the CIP Mill Outlet and at Tailings Dam 5A registered below 2 mg/L. This puts into question Lepanto's recent claim that fish can be found swimming in Tailings Dam 5A as aquatic life cannot survive in conditions where dissolved oxygen is below 2 mg/L.

Some of the team members collecting water samples.

A major source of concern is the high amount of Total Suspended Solids (TSS) and Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) found at the CIP Mill Outlet, the drainage from the underground tunnels, at Tailings Dam 5A and at Lepanto River downstream from TD5A. An increased amount of TSS and TDS indicates that many chemicals/ heavy metals are dissolved in the water. The TDS is of special concern since water with a high TDS may appear clear even if many chemicals/ heavy metals are dissolved in it. Thus the clarity of the water that flows from Lepanto's Tailings Dam 5A is no guarantee that it is indeed safe.

Further, Lepanto's claim that Tailings Dam 5A is actually helping to contain siltation is likewise deceiving. The high level of TDS and TSS from the CIP Mill Outlet up to Tailings Dam 5A indicates that the silt originates from company operations and is NOT natural siltation. The high level of TDS downstream from the Tailings Dam 5A also indicates that not all of this silt is being contained.

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Another cause of concern are the water quality readings obtained at the mouth of the Abra River at Rancho Casiber, Santa, Ilocos Sur. Dissolved oxygen again fell below 2 mg/L, and Total Dissolved Solids was again very high. The mouth of the Abra River is a very important area as this is where fish from the sea enter freshwater to lay their eggs and grow their young. While the various factors that may be causing the above conditions need to be investigated further. It must be noted however that the mouth of any river is also the ultimate site of accumulation of pollutants along the entire length of the river, including mine drainage from Lepanto.

Free cyanide levels at several points along the Upper Abra River are above the DENR standard of 0.1 mg/L *(see table 1)*. Cyanide is an extremely toxic chemical used in large-scale gold mining operations to extract the minutest amount of gold. Long-term effects of cyanide poisoning include damage to the heart and the brain. Soil sampling in the vicinity of Tailings Dam 5A proved dangerous for the EIM team as digging of less than 1 meter in depth resulted in water flowing into the site of digging. The soil under the surface was an unstable slurry of sand, soil and water. This indicates that soil around the Tailings Dam is very porous.

Soil sampling done in Camay, Cervantes, Ilocos Sur revealed foul-smelling, dark soil at less than a meter below the surface. Palay in this area were noted to be stunted and had a burnt appearance. Local farmers attribute this to the overflowing of river water and tailings into their ricefields during heavy rain fall in recent years.

...digging of less than 1 meter in depth resulted in water flowing into the site of digging...indicating that soil around the Tailings Dam is very porous.

As evidence of continued environmental degradation of the Abra River by Lepanto were collected by the EIM team, testimonies of community residents at the newly re-opened mine exhaust tunnel at Sitio Pacda, Palasaan, Mankayan, Benguet put into question Lepanto's claims that the exhaust tunnel posed no danger.

Lepanto has obtained a temporary permit to operate the exhaust tunnel from the DENR-Environmental Management Bureau. Residents of Sitio Pacda complained of nasal irritation from the smoke they observed coming from the exhaust at various times of the day, usually late at night or in the early morning. Banana plants have been noted to be wilting abnormally.

In 1997, the air pollution from the Tohking exhaust tunnel caused nausea and vomiting, dizziness and abdominal pain among the residents. Domestic animals also developed eye irritation/ reddening and nosebleed. It is feared that the same thing will happen again soon.

Interview with Lakay Nick Sab-it, the owner of the land where the exhaust tunnel is located, reveals how deception was employed by Lepanto in obtaining right to the land. Lakay Sab-it was payed a mere P30,000 for the lease of his 2,000 square meter lot for 25 years. The elderly man was told that the tunnel was only going to be used for air intake. However, he was made to sign a contract that permitted use of his land "for a sandfill line, ventilation raise and other related mining works, including the conduct of exploratory drilling".

Members of the media interviewed Mayor Manalo Galuten of Mankayan, Benguet to secure a copy of a petition to open the exhaust tunnel allegedly signed by Lepanto workers. Mayor Galuten denied seeing this petition. He also denied signing any Sangguniang Bayan resolution supporting this petition.

Interviews made among Lepanto workers revealed that they were recently made to sign a blank sheet by their supervisors, at the start of their work shift. They were not given the opportunity to read the actual petition they were signing.

At the conclusion of the Environmental Investigatory Mission, members of the Save the Abra River Movement hung a streamer at the Banaoang bridge which read "Save the Abra River! Stop Lepanto expansion!" They vowed to regularize the conduct of such EIMs until pollution of the Abra River is halted and the river runs clear once again.

Table 1

Sampling Point	Cyanide Level (mg/L)
CIP Mill Outlet	0.187
Tailings Dam 5A Mid-Portion	0.1685
Tailings Dam 5ANear Penstock	0.876
Lepanto River Downstream from TD5A	0.98
Kayan	0.885

new project...from page 11

reproductive health, and promoting adolescent reproductive health.

Similar trainings were held on July 19-24 for people's organizations in Iloilo and Negros Occidental and on August 27 for Leyte and Samar.

In another related news, the VPHCS sponsored a Forum on Migration and Trafficking of Filipino Women and Children. Professor Luz Ilagan from the Ateneo de Davao University spoke from her years of direct encounters with prostituted women and children and her vast experience in working with groups addressing this serious problem facing our country.

...poverty and widespread unemployment has propelled the wave of migration... Prostitution, sex trafficking and the many ills that go with these are rooted in deep-seated problems long besetting the country.

Members of Gabriela, a women's organization, and Migrante partylist also shared some data on the issue. According to Gabriela, the government's bid to project the country as a major tourist destination has increased the number of prostituted women.

Government policies also favor the export of entertainers and domestic helpers, putting them at risk. Published studies on deployment of overseas Filipino workers from 1999 to 2001 showed that over 50 percent of all deployments were comprised of domestic helpers and entertainers.

Women form the majority of the seven million Filipino foreign workers. Yet, some 700 workers , mostly women, die each year due to maltreatment.

The forum also pointed out that poverty and widespread unemployment has propelled the wave of migration for the past 20 years. Prostitution, sex trafficking and the many ills that go with these are rooted in deep-seated problems long besetting the country. But until now, the government has done nothing to stop these. Indeed, it takes a lot of political will and sincere efforts to do so.

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malindang...from page 6

We also held an *operation tuli* which most of our guys handled but I think they were only able to do only six circumcision since we ran out of supplies.

Barangay Lake

Day 4. We woke up this morning with the remains of the heavy rain last night. Part of me was hoping our travel to barangay Lake that morning would be cancelled. But I guess the mission has to continue, rain or shine. So, we packed up our bags and prepared to leave.The heavy foliage kept us from the rain. It was an easier walk compared to the one we had before this.

The survey we had the following day (day 5) was uneventful and was much like the one we had at the previous barangay. However, we finished much earlier since there were only a few residents there. We packed up our things since we'd be traveling back to barangay Mansawan after lunch that day. They said we'll be traveling all the way to Iligan.

Homeward Bound

It took us quite a while to reach barangay Mansawan from barangay Lake. That must be the longest walk of all the walks I had in my life. I was so dead tired. Our group was divided into smaller groups; the fastest one, way up front and the slowest one, way behind and some others in between. The only thing that spiced up that hike was the bird calls we hollered at each other to sort of inform the others how far apart we already are.

Three to four hours later, we finally arrived at our destination and had just enough time to take our dinner and needed rest.

Finale

"Hello, sunshine!", and we were off again; this time, to the nearest bus station or any means of transportation that would take us to the ZPHEP Center at Ozamis. It took another several kilometers and another several hours but I really didn't care much anymore. I seemed to have lost track of the time and the next thing I know, we were already in Ozamis picking up our things. One week seemed like a short time but I do hope there would be other times to join the ZPHEP troop in the future. Maybe next time, YOU could join us then.

Herbal Soap Making

Herbal soap is a kind of soap made of natural ingredients from juice or extract of medicinal plants. They are either used as antifungal, antiseptic for wounds, cleansing, bleaching and moisturizing. The following can be used in making herbal soaps:

- Akapulko- used as antifungal
- Kataka-taka- used as antifungal
- Papaya- for bleaching
- Calamansi- for skin cleansing
- Bayabas- used as antiseptic for wound
- Cucumber- fruit extract or juice used as moisturizer

Utensils:

- Plastic pail
- Wooden ladle or bamboo stick
- Glass or cup
- Mortar and pestle
- Cheese cloth or strainer
- Knife and chopping board
- Cooking pot (preferably made of clay, enamel, stainless or glass)
- Stove
- Plastic molder

Materials:

- 1 glass Caustic Soda (NaOH)*
- 3 glasses of decoction, cooled. **
- 5 glasses of cooking oil (vegetable oil)
- coloring powder (FD&C standard) optional*

****Decoction preparation**

1. Wash the leaves thoroughly and chop or cut in small pieces.
2. Measure 1 glass of chopped fresh leaves and 2 glasses of water.
3. Let it boil for 15 minutes (start timing when the water starts to boil).
4. After 15 minutes, remove from fire and strain with cheesecloth. Set aside and let it cool.

Procedure

1. Prepare the materials and the utensils needed.
2. Measure 1 glass of caustic soda and 3 glasses of the decoction and pour into a plastic pail.
3. Mix well by stirring continuously using wooden ladle or bamboo stick in just one direction, until the caustic soda is dissolved.
4. Pour 5 glasses cooking oil into the mixture.
6. Continue stirring until a consistency of a condensed milk is achieved.
7. Pour the soap mixture into desired plastic molders. Set aside and let it cool to harden.
8. After 4-5 hours, remove the soap from the molder.
9. Age the products for 30 days to neutralize the ingredients. Pack and label the soap products.

REMINDERS

- Caustic Soda can harm the skin upon contact. Wash immediately with vinegar or anything sour and then wash it with soap and water. Be sure to use a mask and gloves when handling the chemical.
- Stop using the product if sign of irritation appears.

***Med Herbal Atbp. accepts orders for Caustic Soda and coloring powder. See page 5 for contact details**

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